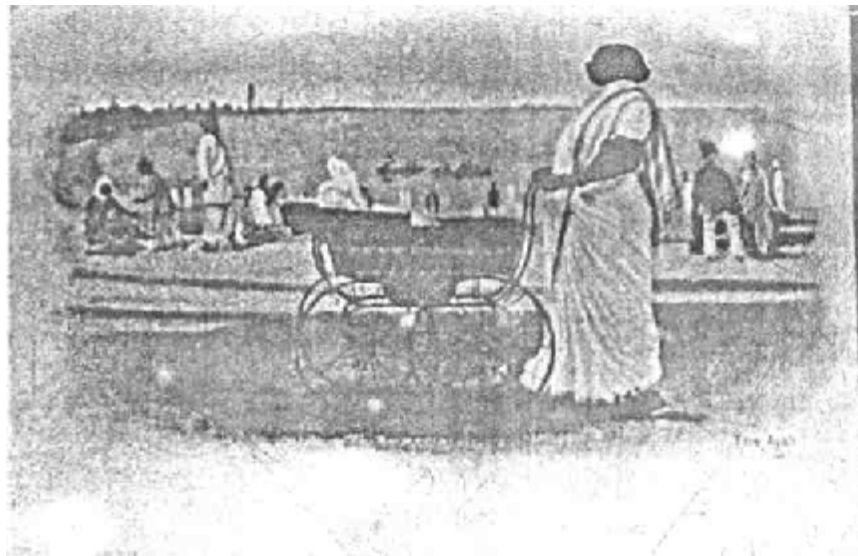


## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

Dhurandhar, who could switch from miniatures to large ethnological paintings with ease (Fig. 51), progressed from posters and decorations for state occasions to the ambitious murals at the Secretariat in New Delhi.<sup>79</sup>

Dhurandhar's debut at the Bombay Art Society was in 1892 as a painting student. His proposed entry so impressed Greenwood that he personally submitted it to the Society. The drawing won Dhurandhar a prize of Rs 50, the first of the awards he won at the Society which made his reputation in the region. Dhurandhar described the day that he won the prize: he and eight other boys from the art school presented themselves in formal dress at the Secretariat, where they were allocated seats in the gallery. The exhibition was opened by the Governor and graced by the presence of dignitaries. A greater honour came his way three years later. With his oil, *Have You Come Lakshmi?* (Fig. 52), based on a Hindu religious ceremony, he became the first Indian to win the Society's gold medal. Dhurandhar was a regular prizewinner at shows around the country, including the Madras Fine Arts Exhibition and a number of industrial exhibitions.<sup>80</sup>

Young Dhurandhar's fascination with *Venus de' Medici* and *Apollo Saurochthonos* had drawn him to art; figure painting remained a lifelong passion with him, though a private one. Dhurandhar continued to produce nudes even as a teacher, though models were not easily available. Like many other colonial artists, he mostly relied on prints and photographs, and sent regularly for English books on figure drawing as well as Parisian photographic studies of the nude, commonly used by western artists. It was in the 1920s that regular drawings from undraped figures were introduced at the school by Gladstone Solomon (Fig. VI). Even then



48 M. V. Dhurandhar.  
*Ayah*. Postcard designed by  
him



49 M. V. Dhurandhar: *And Fill her cup with wheat cakes and bits of coconut*, Kincaid, *Deccan Nursery Tales*

## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

Dhurandhar never ceased to use photographs as a source for figure work. This constant scrutiny of the human form gave him the Confidence to produce large-scale figures for his murals. There is the touching story that during his visit to Paris in 'the thirties he immersed himself in painting from the nude model



50 M. V. Dhurandhar:  
*Kerala Beauty*,  
Rothferd.  
*Women of India*

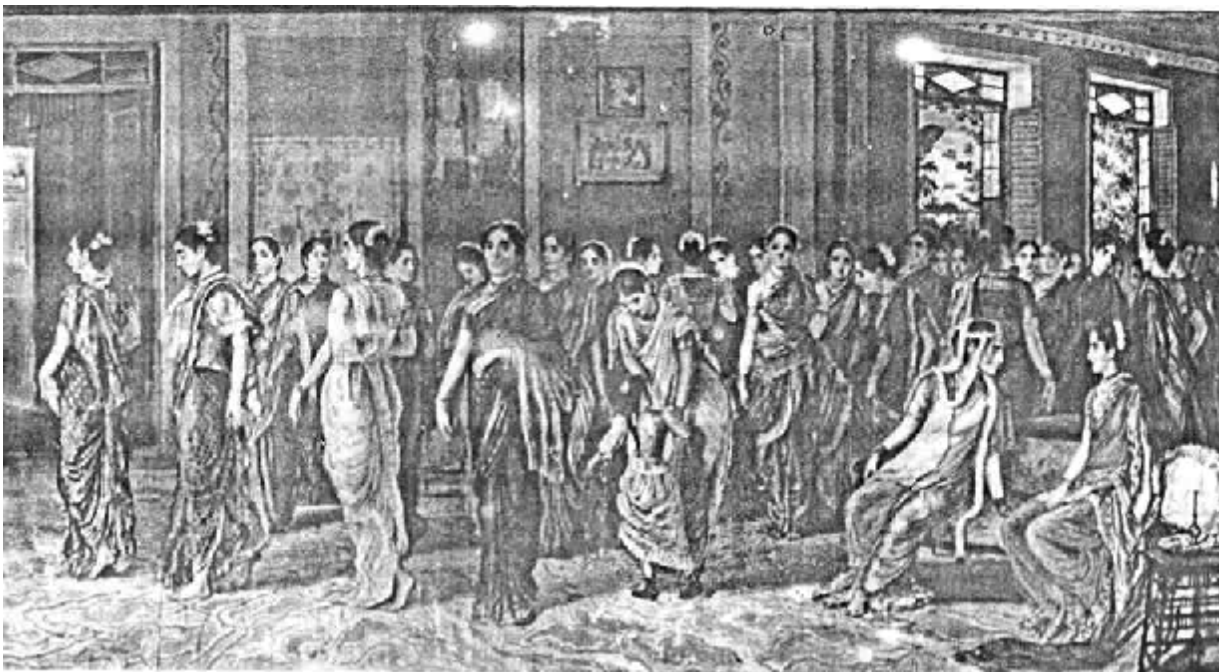
*The Rembrandt of the East; Samuel Rahamin RA; A. H. Midler*

Antonio Xavier Trindade (1870—1935), nicknamed 'the Rembrandt of the East', was born in Goa of Catholic parents. On his father's death, he emigrated to Bombay to earn a living. After graduation, he assisted in tinting photographs for the studio of Raja Deen Dayal, the leading Indian photographer, which had opened in Bombay in 1896...Photographic-studios turned to art graduates as the demand for tinted photographs grew-Trindade did not remain long with Dayal, for his prospects at the art school were good. Undoubtedly talented, the Raj policy of offering incentives to Christians and children of mixed race also worked in his favour.<sup>82</sup>

Soon after he joined the school, the superintendentship of the Reay Workshops fell vacant. Trindade was chosen for the job instead of Dhurandhar. The Maharastrian's fortunes had suffered a temporary eclipse, possibly because the new Principal, Cecil Burns, viewed him with suspicion. Trindade specialised in portraits such as the striking *Hindu Girl* (Fig. VII), which supplemented his income from teaching. He turned to sentimental interiors, landscapes and nudes in later years (Figs 53, 54). His *forte* was intimate domestic scenes featuring his wife and daughters, such

as the prizewinning *Flora* (1920) (Fig. 55). A Catholic, Trindade was unique among Indian artists in treating Christian subjects (Fig. 56). The most moving among these was the *Ecce Homo*, painted on the eve of his death following the amputation of his gangrenous legs."<sup>83</sup>

51 M. V. Dhurandhar: *A Hindu Marriage Ceremony*, a many-figured watercolour composition (1908)



## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

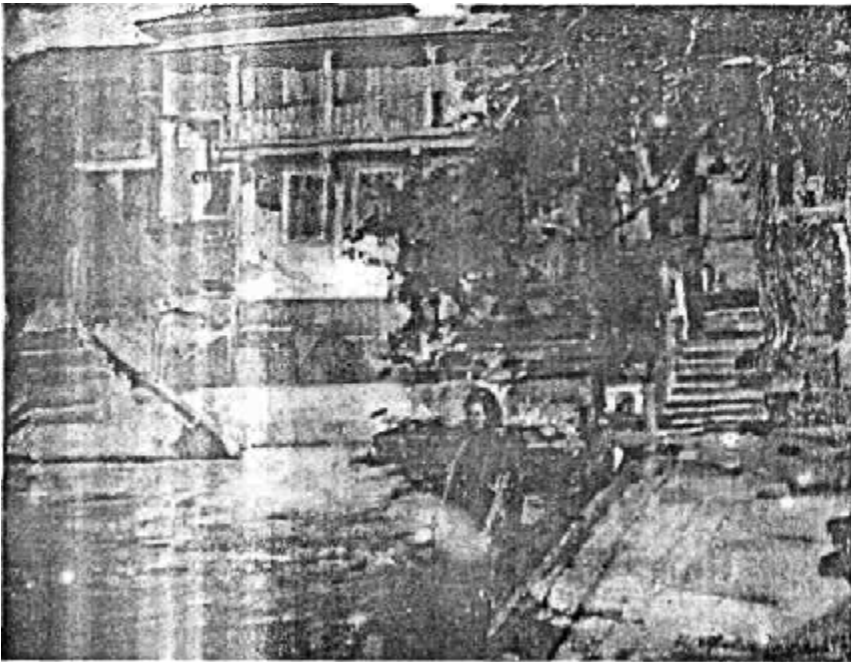
Archibald Herman Muller's (1878-1952) father, a German Protestant from Cochin, had married an Indian Catholic. Muller went to the Madras art school, where he had dazzled with a memory drawing at the admission test. This exercise was highly regarded by the teachers of the time. After graduation, Muller worked briefly as an assistant in his brother's photographic studio in Madras. He then tried his luck in various parts of India, ending up in Bombay in 1910, the accepted haven of westernisers. The next year, he won the Bombay Art Society's top award in painting



52 M. V. Dhurandhar; *Have you come Laksmi?*, oil, Bombay Art Society gold medal, 1895

with his *Princess Giving Gift to A Brahmin Boy* (Fig. 57), a work inspired by 53 A. X. Trindade: *Nude*, Ravi Varma's famous painting on a similar theme of charity (Fig. 5). But oil, on Dhurandhar's use of this did not lead to a steady income. A joint painting class with another the same model, sec colour artist fell through, and Muller was reduced to giving private lessons in painting in his small apartment. When the First World War broke out, because of his part-German background, he had the choice of internment or joining the volunteer reserve force. He chose the latter, gaining popularity with his deft sketches.<sup>84</sup>

Early in this century Muller responded to nationalism by combing the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* for inspiration. His historical narratives were based on the study of the nude, a genre that demonstrated skills in naturalism. Yet so strong was the grip of anti-naturalism in this period, that he felt impelled to make two watercolour versions of a *Ramayana* scene: a 'naturalistic' one and another in a 'flat, linear style' of orientalist inspiration. The following are his most important history paintings: *Ganga's Descent into Patala* (Fig. VIII), *Sakuntala at Dusyanta's Court*, *The Prediction of Prince Siddharta*, *Krsna and Arjuna at Kuruksetra*, *Draupadi's Vastraharan*, *Ulupi and Arjuna* and *Usa's Dream*. He also treated a nationalist theme of Maharastran inspiration: the Hindu hero Shivaji imprisoned in the Agra Fort by the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (Fig. 59). The strength of Muller's paintings lay in a sure knowledge of human anatomy and a fluid and elegant deployment of multiple figures. The assurance of his figures, especially in sketches, is hard to explain in view of



54 A. X. Trindade: *Landscape*, oil

## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

his training at the craft-oriented Madras art school. It must be added however that unlike his sensitive drawings some of the paintings verged on a 'sugary' treatment worthy of Cabanel (Fig. 6o).<sup>85</sup>

Muller was yet another individualist who had a fierce belief in artistic integrity. Once when a client brought back one of his paintings to be altered according to his wishes, the starving artist preferred to return his fees rather than accede to his demand. Another time, the wife of the Governor of Bombay expressed an interest in one of his works at a BAS exhibition. But Muller did not allow her to buy it, because the work had already been promised to a friend. Nor did he make another copy for fear of soliciting her favour. On yet another occasion, being upset by a patron's insensitivity, he tore up the painting in front of him.<sup>86</sup>

Poverty finally drove Muller to take employment under the Maharaja of Bikaner in 1922. His assignment was to record hunting trips of the ruler. There was no question of the prince not admiring his talents, but the duties proved onerous. Muller soon gave them up, for he needed time for his large figure compositions. His return to Bombay was followed by a hasty marriage, rather late in life, to his young niece, and by mounting financial difficulties. In 1928 his work won yet another BAS award. But

55 A. X. Trindade: *Flora*,  
oil, gold medal, Bombay Art  
Society, 1920: the subject his  
wife





ironically he could not even afford to take his own family to the exhibition. Having no other alternative, since Muller now had a family to feed, he returned to Rajasthan as the state artist of Jodhpur. He lived beyond 1947 to see India independent.<sup>81</sup>

Samuel Rahamin (1880-1965) belonged to the Bene Israel community of Tunc. After a period at the Bombay art school, he left for London to study under academic artists Solomon J. Solomon and John Singer Sargent, the leading society painter. The second Indian student at the Royal Academy, he was preceded by the Parsi, Rustam Siodia (Fig. 61).



56 A. X. Trindade: *A Little Boy*, oil



#### THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

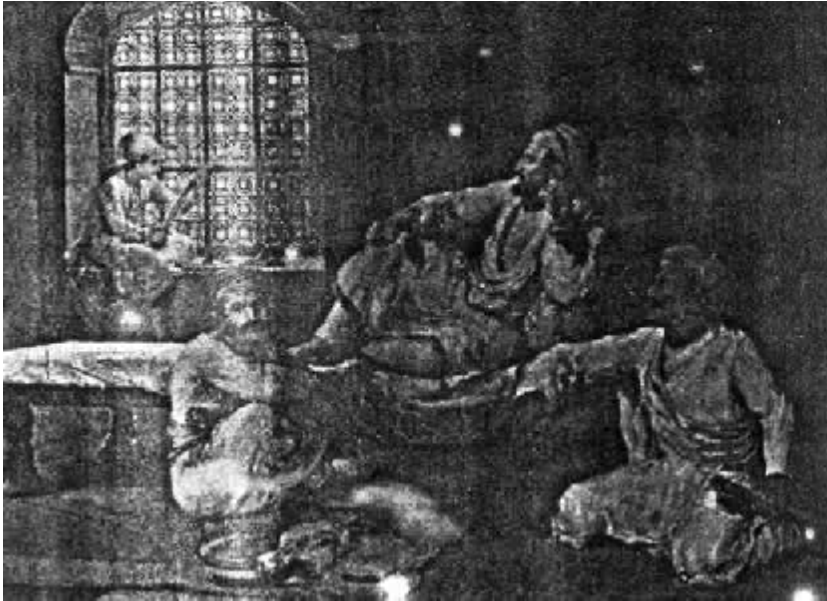
Rahamin exhibited at the Academy in 1906. On his return to India, Rahamin became court painter and art adviser to Baroda (Fig. 62). Five accomplished oil portraits of the Gaekwad family were executed between 1908-18.<sup>88</sup> In 1914, he held his first one-man show at the Goupil Galleries in London and showed at Arthur Tooth's in 1925. He was actively promoting his own works as late as the thirties, with a show at the Arlington Galleries in 1935. The Jewish artist had the distinction of being the only Indian to have works in the Tate Gallery. Rahamin's exalted self-image led Dhurandhar to comment sarcastically, 'There is no need to discuss his work. He is an artist and a writer, and considers himself a genius.' An inextricable and colourful part of the Bombay art scene, the story of his conversion to nationalist 'orientalist' art is related later (ch. 9).

57 A. H. Muller: *Princess giving Gift to Brahmin Boy*, oil, inspired by Ravi Varma's famous work (Fig. 58)



58 Right Ravi Varma: *Woman giving*





59 A. H. Muller: *Sivaji in Agra*, oil



60 A. H. Muller; *Usha*, oil

## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

### *The sculptor Mhatre's finest hour*

Among early sculptors, Ganpatrap Mhatre (1876-1947) is associated with a romantic episode in the history of colonial art in India. His student work caused a sensation that catapulted him to a fame rivalling that of Ravi Varma. Originally, he enrolled to be a painter, but emerged as the first



R. Siodia: *Figures*, chalk drawings produced at the Royal Academy

major academic sculptor. The story of Mhatre's work, *To the Temple* (Figs 63, 64), shows the early promise of a gifted student that was never wholly fulfilled. Mhatre, a Prabhu caste, was encouraged by his father, who worked as a clerk in the army secretariat at Pune.<sup>90</sup> Dhurandhar, his contemporary, has chronicled Mhatre's finest hour: a young painting student, who was working on a semi-life-size plaster figure, consistently absented himself from the school. Because of the high rate of student absenteeism, Principal Greenwood summoned him to explain himself. Mhatre was looking for this opportunity to give the teacher an unusual surprise. Before inviting him into the class, Mhatre placed his sculpture strategically so that it was clearly visible to Greenwood as he entered the room. The subject was a young Maharastrian woman on her way to the temple, the work strikingly attractive in its easy grace and elegant proportions. Mhatre, who had produced it without any assistance from his teachers, never again matched this inspired work. On entering the room, Greenwood was somewhat taken aback by the piece, exclaiming: how could you produce such an excellent piece without training in sculpture?

The Bombay Art Society's silver medal followed the public debut of *To the Temple* in 1896. An ecstatic review appeared in the *Times of India* (13 February 1896):

Another chief feature of the exhibition is... a surprisingly good piece of sculpture by a young Hindu, G. K. Mhatre, a student of the School of Art, If any one can doubt whether a prophet can conic out of Nazareth, let him go and see this figure of a Hindu girl going to the temple ... this is the best piece of sculpture that has ever been done in India, and to any one who knows what comparatively limited opportunities this youth has had for studying sculpture, it will not appear too much to say that it is work of genius."

Ravi Varma declared it to be 'the most beautiful production of the kind I have even seen by a native'.<sup>93</sup> For Greenwood, there could be no better vindication of the school, since art schools had recently been threatened with extinction,

It may seem curious that India, where sculpture had been the most developed art since antiquity, had produced no salon sculptor until Mhatre. One guess is that English art teachers did not see the need to encourage sculpture. Hindu sculpture, they were convinced, was not high art in the Classical sense, and could therefore be taught in the decorative section. What caught them unprepared was Mhatre's triumph, which seemed to vindicate the Indian ability to absorb Greco-Roman precepts painlessly, Bhirdwood was promptly despatched a photograph of the work by Greenwood, for the support of this critic was vital. He was enchanted with the work| forming his impression from the photograph that it was a marble statuette, whose purity reminded him of Canova:

62 S. Fyzec Rahamin:  
*Maharani Chimna Bai II*,  
oil. Compare this portrait  
with Varma's earlier one  
(Fig. XVI)



## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

In its technique it is wonderful, and although I may be biased by my instinctive sympathy with an Indian artist, I believe myself to be moved solely by artistic emotion when, every time I look on the photograph ... I derive from its contemplation an ever-heightened delight."<sup>4</sup>

Birdwood, who believed in self-taught genius, advised against subjecting him to discipline, for 'Mhatre, one sees at first glance, possesses this genius in sculpture, the most arduous, and, therefore the greatest of the Fine Arts ...'.<sup>95</sup> He doubted if any living English sculptor with all his technical



63 G. K. Mhatre: *To the Temple*, plaster of Paris, profile



64 Right G. K. Mhatre: *to the Temple*, rear view

dexterity and refined ideals could rival such an unaffected expression of truth to nature as in this 'Diploma piece'. In technical skill, gracefully dignified pose and harmonious composition, the figure was 'Greek of the Greeks'.

An enemy of art schools, Birdwood ascribed its beauty to Mhatre's 'pristine Aryan instincts' and to a direct application of the chisel to the marble unhampered by hide-bound teaching. In an ecstatic climax, he declared, 'I know of no modern statue so completely attractive to me', urging westerners to profit from Mhatre's experience of working directly on the marble. Equally, he warned Mhatre's Hindu patrons against corrupting his Classical sensibility by making him treat the 'monstrous' Hindu gods. In a typical Birdwoodian vein, he ascribed the spiritual sweetness of the piece to the Christian Pax Britannica, while cautioning 'the primitive Aryan sculptor' against the corrupting powers of industrial -society.<sup>96</sup>

Nothing pleased Greenwood more. Birdwood had un wittingly vindicated art school training, by presuming that 'the admirable character of his work is largely due to his . . . avoiding all contact with a school of art'.<sup>97</sup> Greenwood proceeded to disabuse him, 'I am therefore bound, in justice to the Bombay School of Art in general, and Mr Griffiths, the late Principal in particular, to state that Mhatre has been a student of this school since 1891, and is so at the moment'. *To the Temple* united higher western techniques with the Hindu sentiment. The young man's 'Greek' spirit had been awakened by his exposure to the antique collection at the school. The Director took melancholy satisfaction from the fact that of all people, Birdwood had been taken in. What he failed to mention was that the work was completed by a student, whose major subject was not modelling, without any guidance from the teachers.<sup>98</sup>

No matter, for Greenwood had Mhatre's best interests at heart. He appealed to Birdwood to support *his* proposal for sending the young artist abroad. Since

the only education of Mhatre had been Western and . . . good as it may be, does not rank by any means with that of the best European sculptors in knowledge and technique, and therefore as there is no one here who can practically teach him anything more in that direction, it is a pity that while he is young and capable of further training ... he should not have the best that can be got,<sup>99</sup>

But oh ideological grounds, Birdwood refused to sanction government 'spoonfeeding' and recommended that such funds should be sought solely to augment private funding.<sup>100</sup>

The Maharastran student became an unwitting pawn among the warring:factions. Poor Mhatre! Fired by the prospect of going abroad, he sent an urgent plea to Birdwood, begging his help in finding patrons in



## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

England. He himself was too poor to visit Europe, 'the motherland of art'. But he was capable of handling marble, though *To the Temple* happened to be in plaster.<sup>101</sup> Once Birdwood entered the controversy, it inevitably spread among art teachers. R. F. Chisholm of Madras, implacably hostile to Birdwood, indignantly dismissed the work as that of a novice and made fun of the outpourings of Birdwood's effusive heart.<sup>102</sup> Birdwood, however, never lost interest in Mhatre. In 1899, chairing a meeting in London to introduce the Bengali painter Sashi Hesh, he did not omit to mention in passing: 'The Bombay School of Art has also produced a sculptor of the highest promise in Mr. Mhatre' He implored Hesh to find him a generous benefactor.

Plans to secure a passage to Europe for Mhatre were set in motion almost immediately after the news of his sculpture broke among the cognoscenti in Bombay. Greenwood may have had a hand in the *Times of India* notice that appealed to the local notables to fund Mhatre's training in Paris. He and another teacher, E. T. DeClosay, gave open testimonials to Mhatre in his search for finance.<sup>104</sup> Failing to move wealthy Indians, Greenwood decided to appeal to the generosity of British art lovers. In 1897, details about Mhatre were sent out to the *Magazine of Art*, partly to inform the British public of the successful transplant of high art in the empire. It 'is with pleasure that we publish the illustration ... to show the development of Sculptural Art in India ... [it is] quite a new departure from the usual grotesque and unidealised work of native sculptors, and bears high testimony to the influence and teaching of the School of which Mr J. Griffiths is the headmaster', stated the magazine. It further declared that as there was 'no interest or appreciation of this kind of Art among the wealthy Hindus... we [ask] our patrons of Art to afford Mr Mhatre the necessary facilities to complete his work'.<sup>105</sup> Mhatre was the first Indian to appear in this leading magazine of salon art in Britain.

The last resort for Mhatre's champions was the government. Discreet overtures were made in 1893 with a photograph of the piece sent to the Governor of Bombay. In 1899, the Director of Public Instruction forwarded the art school's entreaties to the provincial government and to Calcutta, hinting at the need for funds to transfer the piece to marble. The attached resolution reminded the government that it was an ideal example of 'the influence of Western training judiciously applied to Oriental Art'. Acknowledgements were received from Lord Curzon's office and from the Governor of Bombay, but the invitation to finance Mhatre was politely ignored.<sup>106</sup> In 1899, the *Times of India* made a final plea on behalf of 'the most beautiful statue that was ever modelled in India ..... [it] stands in the vestibule surrounded by all well-known classical types of statuary, and holds its own among them'.<sup>107</sup> From distant Lahore, *The Tribune* (31 May 1900), a nationalist daily, roundly condemned the failure of native patronage'. As late as 1901, when the art teachers had given up, the

65 G. K. Mhatre: *Sarasvati*,  
plaster of Paris



supporters of the sculptor launched a final appeal in the Bengali monthly, *Prabasi*, for help in sending Mhatre abroad.<sup>108</sup>

Nothing came of these efforts. In keeping with art school practice, Mhatre was offered a teaching post, which he declined in favour of an independent practice. In 1900 his sculpture, *Sarasvati* (Fig. 65), was sent to the *exposition universelle* in Paris. It was unflatteringly described by a French critic as a symbolic statue of Saraswati, holding a guitar and playing some new imperialist ditty of Kipling's. An English crown sat precariously on her head like a pith-helmet. The combined weight of the two objects prevented her from recovering her graceful posture.<sup>109</sup> The international jury, which had been extremely generous with awards, felt otherwise. on 28 August 1900, Mhatre was informed of their award of a bronze medal and a Diploma of Honour to him."<sup>110</sup>

Cecil Burns, who succeeded Greenwood in 1901, proudly announced at his annual address to the school that 'Mhatre's work was exhibited among, and was criticised in comparison with, the works of the greatest sculptors of Europe and America'.<sup>111</sup> The school's *ex officio* patron, the Governor of Bombay, added in his speech: 'One of its [the art school's] most notable products in the higher branches of art is Mr. Mhatre, a young Hindu, whose statue "Saraswatee" which could bear comparison with the works of some of the greatest modern sculptors of Europe and America, has obtained, in honourable mention at The world's exposition which is no small achievement. . .'.<sup>112</sup> The *Magazine of Art* reported the Paris triumph of Mhatre. It had been a bad year for English artists at the Paris exposition, who were victims of the prevailing frost in Anglo-French relations."<sup>113</sup>

Mhatre's next triumph was at the Delhi exhibition to mark the Imperial Durbar of 1903. The catalogue made a point of mentioning his studio run 'on the most approved European lines'. The works included 'To the Temple, and a new composition, *Parvati as Sabari* (Fig. 66). Although described as smacking more of Paris than the East, *Sabari* received the highest award'.<sup>114</sup> In 1904 the Maharaja received a public commission for an over-life-size memorial statue of Queen Victoria. The plaster model had a preliminary viewing at the Bombay Art Society in 1905. Completed in 1910, the work was duly installed in Ahmedabad. The powerful piece was inspired by the standard memorial sculptures of the Queen in Britain and the empire. In Carrara marble, it shows the Queen seated, wearing an intricate garment of lace and embroidery and holding the symbolic sceptre and orb. Other monumental works of Mhatre were a seven-foot-high figure of Ranade in Bombay and commissions from the princely states of Kolhapur, Gwalior and Mysore. Mhatre had established a foundry and built up an enviable practice in large statues. But even at the Wembley Empire Exhibition of 1924 it was his first work that stood for Bombay's unique success.

66 G. K. Mhatre: *Parvati as Sabari*, plaster of Paris



## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

### Early academic artists of Calcutta

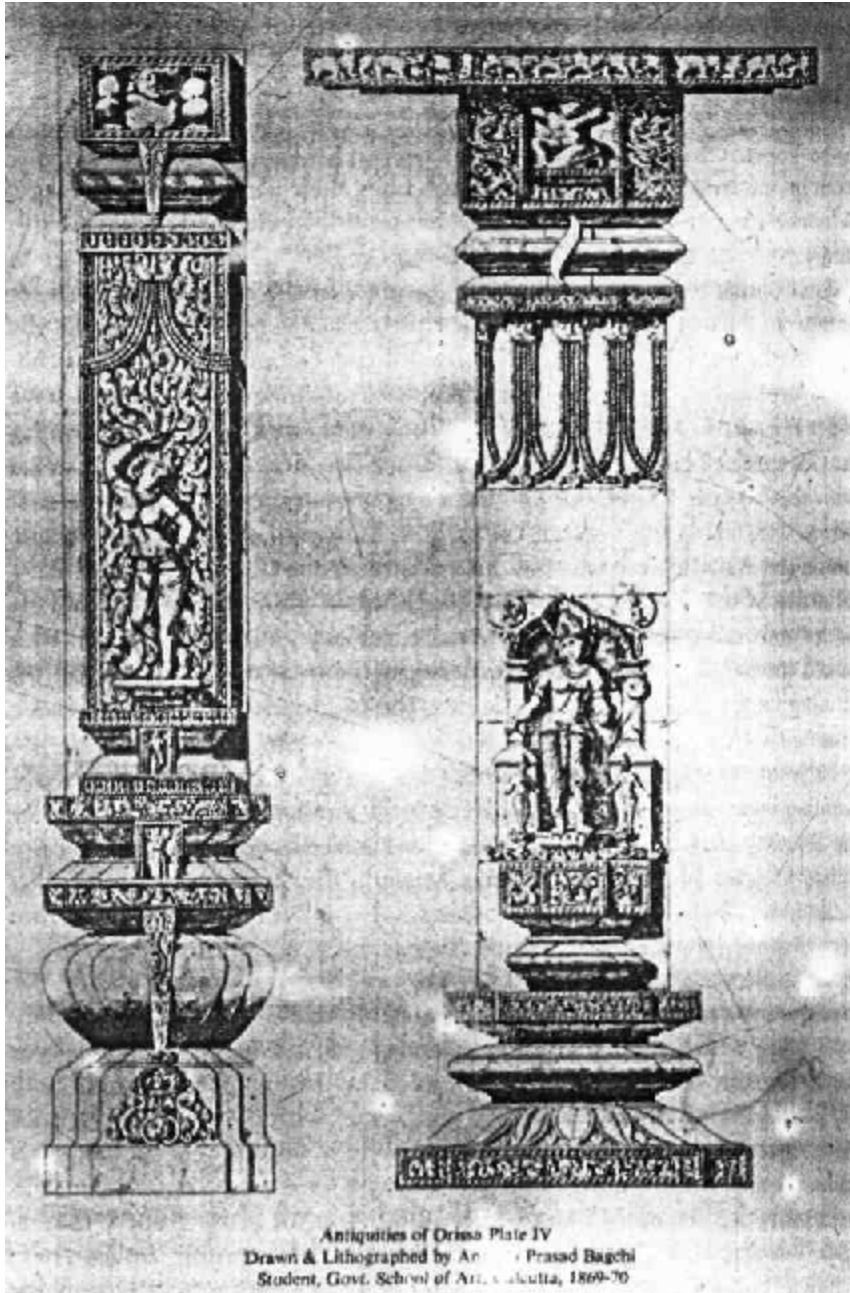
#### *Two pioneer Bengalis*

After a brief spell with a professional engraver, Annada Prasad IBagchi (1849-1905) enrolled at the Calcutta art school. His father had initially objected to his artistic ambitions because 'in those days people considered that profession a lowly one'. When Bagchi enrolled in 1865, the art school contained an appreciable mber of artisans; by the time he left, 'the number of boys with schooling and from respectable families was on the increase', noted the art magazine, *Shilpa Pushpanjali*. Bagchi's studies of heads at the 1873 Calcutta exhibition were praised by Temple for 'remarkable merit and originality, very creditable to Bengal and Bengalees.. .'. The following year, the artist 'carried off the gold medal offered... for the best painting by a native of India' at the Madras Fine Art Exhibition."<sup>9</sup>

Even though Bagchi became a portrait painter of the affluent, today he is remembered more as a graphic artist. His student work as the illustrator of Rajendralala Mitra's *Antiquities of Orissa* (1869-70) (Fig. 67) helped to create his reputation. He graduated in 1876 but was soon engaged to teach lithography at the school after the departure of its European teacher. The Bengali subsequently rose to be Headmaster, some years before Dhuran-dhar in Bombay. As an up-and-coming graphic artist, he designed the main certificate for the Calcutta exhibition of 1883. In 1885-6, the acting Principal Olinto Ghilardi described him as a foremost Indian artist, who was 'ignorant of prejudices'. Ghilardi praised him again the next year: 'the institution is largely indebted to him for various artistic productions which have contributed to raise the fame of the Calcutta School of Art'.

In a period of feverish cultural activity, young Bagchi's energies were not confined to the school. He brought out *Shilpa Pushpanjali*, the first Bengali art magazine, and possibly the first Indian art magazine. Bagchi embellished the paper with lithographs and wood engravings, a practice that continued until the half-tone process replaced older techniques. Above all, in providing a forum for aesthetic discussions, *Shilpa Pushpanjali* gave a boost to artistic nationalism. The ambitious graphic artist soon moved on to \$ commercial venture, the Calcutta Art Studio, which became a local byword for colour lithography.

Bamapada Bandopadhaya (1851-1932) was younger than Bagchi. Disappointed with the oil painting course at the school, he apprenticed himself to an early art graduate, Pramathalal Mitra. With the arrival of a German artist, Karl Becker, in Calcutta, Bamapada became his assistant to gain further experience. At the 1879 exhibition in the city he received accolades with his prize-winning *Juggler and Monkey*. In 1881, as different regions of India became more accessible, Bamapada decided to seek his fortune outside Bengal. Starting as a painter of the wealthy in Allahabad,



67 A. P. Bagchi: a page from *Antiquities of Orissa*, lithograph

## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

he reached as far north as Lahore before settling down in Calcutta in 188, Bamapada regularly collected prizes at winter exhibitions in Calcutta.

### *The landscapes of Jamini Prokash Gangooly*

The aristocratic Jamini Prokash Gangooly was a landscapist of distinction (1876-1953). Closely related to the Tagores, his artistic inspiration came from his uncle Abanindranath, though later their paths were to diverge. When he was very small, he tells us, he once boldly finished one of Aban's landscapes in his absence. 'Wonderful was the fiery glow of the setting sun and its exquisitely delicate reflection glittered in the river. But the lovely tints were fading fast, and I felt tempted to add some touches to the unfinished picture of my uncle's', reminisced Gangooly later.<sup>123</sup> Somewhat surprised by Jamini's daring, Abanindranath encouraged him with paper and paint. The twelve-year-old boy decorated the text welcoming the Governor of Bengal at this school. Lord Lansdowne, who was pleased with this boyish effort, spoke words of encouragement. Jamini's first lessons were with the veteran oil painter, Gangadhar Dey. Close in age, Jamini and Abanindranath took instructions from C. G. Palmer, an artist trained at South Kensington. The Englishman was active in Calcutta art circles and had presented his works to the art gallery.<sup>124</sup> Jamini, who lacked his uncle's intellectual restlessness, painstakingly completed his training under Palmer, thereby laying the foundations of his impressive brushwork.<sup>125</sup>

Early on Gangooly moved into the India-wide exhibition circuit, winning awards regularly at exhibitions in Simla and Bombay, notably the Bombay Art Society gold medal in 1910. In 1902, he was the only Indian to enter landscapes at Simla, winning the Finlay prize with *Wet Banks of the Ganges*. *The Pioneer* enthused: 'Mr J. P. Ganguli exhibits some very charming paintings of Bengal river scenery, either moonlight, misty morning or evening "effects". They are very poetic in feeling and tender in colour and treatment'.<sup>126</sup> In 1904 Gangooly made his debut in Bombay with more landscapes, including *Morning Mist*, which won the silver medal for oils. The *Times of India* hailed his landscapes as a genuinely indigenous vision of nature, which contrasted with the *deracirii* works of Bombay artists, including Dhurandhar, none of whom ever succeeded in striking a genuine Indian note.<sup>127</sup>

In 1907, the *Times of India* wrote pointedly not only about Dhurandhar, but about Pithawalla and Rustam Siodia as well: 'unless these gentlemen's names were there to testify to their pictures being the work of natives of India, they might have been taken for those of European painters. One seeks almost in vain for successors to those masters of miniature portraiture'.<sup>128</sup> Gangooly's *On a Cloudy Night* was singled out as capturing a typical view of nature and the peculiar quality of the Indian intellect. The *Times of India* did not mince its words;

Mr Gangooly's picture, despite its poor and inappropriate framing, and the cruelty of surrounding it by landscapes painted with the fullest strength of the palettes... is one of most interesting pictures seen at any of the Society's Exhibitions since the collection of works by Mr Tagore was shown in 1904. It has the same decorative arrangement of line and harmony of colour, so much prized in the ancient Persian and Indian pictures. It lacks the jewel-like finish of those patient craftsmen, but has a poetry not always found in their productions.'

Times were changing, as were the opinions of the *Times of India*. The paeans to the landscapes of Gangooly and the phrase, 'the peculiar quality of the Indian intellect' indicate a growing ambivalence towards what was termed 'Indianisation' among the British. The original label of difference, 'the native artist', reappeared in a new guise in the wake of the orientalist art movement: instead of perfecting the alien western mode, Indian artists were better off producing works that reflected their own 'racial psychology' (see ch. 7).

One is not entirely convinced of a special 'Indianness' in Gangooly that the other painters lacked. Nor was his style particularly flat and 'decorative', as imagined by the *Times of India*. Perhaps it is hard to decide on the special Indian treatment of landscape. Even Mughal landscapes, the first in Indian art, were inspired by European art. And yet, not only had influential opinion decided in favour of Gangooly's Indianness to the detriment of the Bombay westernisers, but he also got on well with the orientalists, the avowed enemies of naturalism. This was partly because Abanindranath, the leader of the orientalists, still approved of him. In fact if we turn to *Prabasi* of 1902, we notice that Gangooly was already established by the time Abanindranath was coming into prominence. While speaking on the landscapist, *Prabasi* mentioned in passing that Abanindranath's paintings were due to appear in *The Studio* that year.<sup>130</sup>

Gangooly continued to enjoy the confidence of *Bharati*, the nationalist 'house journal' of the Tagores, even after academic art was jettisoned by Abanindranath. The landscapist for his part had turned to ancient literature as early as the 1900s, albeit in the manner of the 'olympians'. Rabindranath felt sufficiently moved by his painting based on *Kadamvari* to write an essay on it. Even in 1909, Gangooly was promoted by *Bharati* as a nationalist by virtue of his themes. The painter returned the compliment with *Virahl Yaksa* (1909), whose theme and treatment paid homage to his uncle. Some months later, the journal carried his painting, *Yudhishthirer Mahaprasthan*, inspired by the last scene in the *Mahabharata*. The canine companion on the Pandava king's last journey, one cannot help noticing, sports a 'post-epic' collar and band.<sup>131</sup>

In 1912, *Bharati* decided to publish a long biographical notice on the artist. To forestall any queries about the small nationalist quotient in his work, extenuating circumstances were pleaded, albeit obliquely; even though he was an academic artist, the Indian themes justified his inclusion

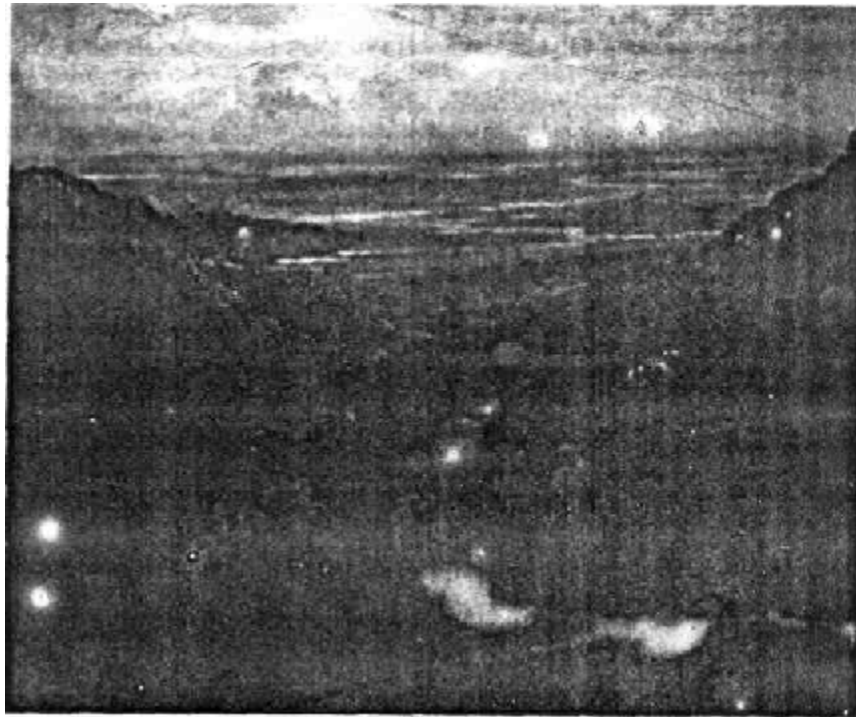


## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

in *Bharati*. The description of his landscapes as a marriage of East and West tacitly appealed to the prognosis of the English newspapers. Gangooly's paintings betray the influence of Millet's elegiac mood and the twilight glow of his landscapes, as in *At the end of the Day*, or *Evening Prayer of Muslims*, in *Bharati*

Gangooly won fame for his atmospheric paintings of natural scenery, the spectacular Himalayan mountain ranges (Fig. IX) and the series on the river Ganges in different moods. The works show a sensitive grasp of the drama, the variety of natural light and the rich colours of the Indian landscape (Figs 68, 69). Above all, they reveal the dedicated craftsman that he was. His painting, *Dusk at the River Padma*, was acquired by the queen-consort of Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy; the artist was decorated by the Italian government in appreciation.

It is not surprising that Gangooly found favour with those Bengalis that enjoyed academic art. In 1910, 1911 and 1916, Suresh Samajpati, the acerbic editor of *Sahitya*, repeatedly praised his representational skill at the height of its feud with *Bharati*. This was in spite of the fact that Gangooly was charhponed by the orientalist. Gangooly enjoyed the confidence of the Tagores until he was chosen as Deputy Principal of the art school in 1916, when a coolness sprang up between him and his uncle. Gangooly's appointment followed Abanindranath's resignation from the school after he was bypassed for the Principalship. The orientalist, who viewed this as

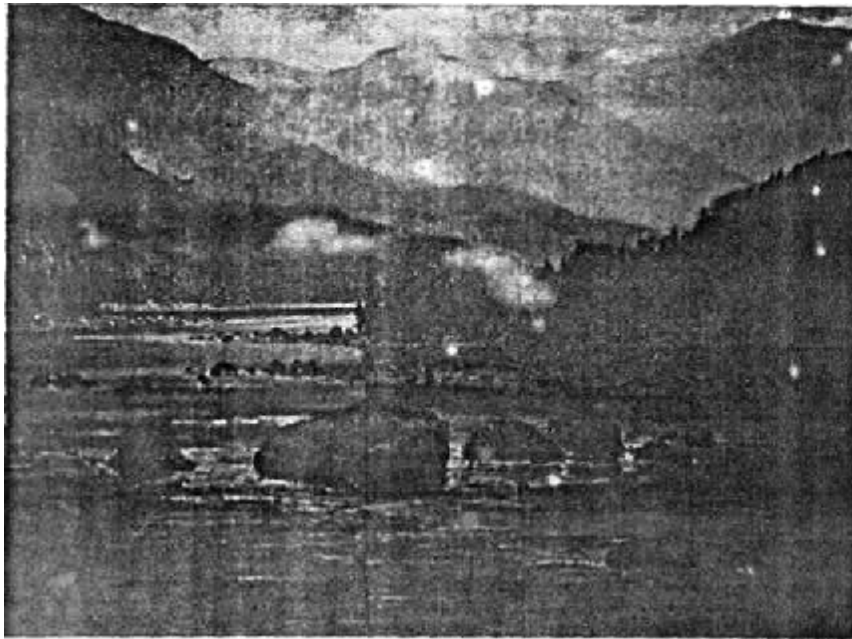


68 J. P.. Gangooly: *Mountain Landscape*, oil

a snub to Abanindranath, were incensed that Gangooly accepted the post. Inevitably, the moment Gangooly entered the school, he became an unwilling mentor of the young westernisers who were trying to regroup against orientalism. Gangooly in turn was forced out of the school in 1928, a victim of the byzantine politics of Raj patronage. A retiring and mild-mannered man, Gangooly eventually returned to friendly terms with the Tagores. Indeed a reconciliation was patched up between uncle and nephew in 1942. In a 'Festschrift' for Abanindranath, he expressed mild regrets at having been unsympathetic to orientalism, which may have been a polite gesture made for the occasion.<sup>134</sup>

*Bengali artist-pilgrims bound for Italy*

The logical aim of an art student in India would be an advanced training in Europe. Because of the British connection, the normal destination of Indian art students -Kundanlal, Siodia, Rahamin, Navroji and Writer, to name a few - was London. Interestingly, Italy became for a while the avowed goal of artists in Bengal. Italian training was of course common in western countries, many of which, notably France, England and the United States, set up 'schools' in Rome where the prize-winning student could reside while imbibing Classical art. It was after the arrival of the Italian teacher, the Chevalier Olinto Ghilardi, at the Calcutta art school in



69 J. P. Gangooly. *Lake and Mountain Scenery*, oil

## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

1886, that an Italian training became a possibility. The members of the Bharatiya Shilpa Samiti (1893) Annada Bagchi, Jamini Gangooly, Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri and Abanindranath Tagore - debated the question of sending art students abroad. Ghilardi advised them and arranged for students to go to Rome.

Of the celebrated Bengali trio bound for Italy, Rohini Kanta Nag and Sashi Hesh received an Italian art education. Theirs was the story of reaching the promised land amid hardships, to learn at the fountainhead of western art. Nag (1868-1895), who belonged to a well-to-do Brahmo family, was admitted to the Royal Academy in Rome on the personal intervention of the Italian prime minister."<sup>6</sup> In 1891 Jobbins of the Calcutta art school reported as follows: 'I find in a Roman Newspaper, *La Riforma*, that Rahani Kanta Nag di Calcutta: formerly a student of the School of Art, has been awarded a special silver medal at the Institution of Fine Arts for modelling the figure. This is the second prize he has won'.<sup>137</sup> Sadly, Rohini did not live to enjoy his achievements. Contracting tuberculosis in Rome, he returned to Calcutta in 1895 to die at twenty-seven. Rabindranath mourned the national loss, offering to bear the cost of bringing his sculptures home from Italy.

The other artist was Sashi Hesh (1869—?), mentioned in connection with Mhatre. From a family of modest means, Hesh started life as a teacher. His Italian journey was conceived while at the art school, with the promise of financial support by a zamindar of East Bengal. But when Hesh arrived in Rome in 1894, he carried with him a little cash and a letter of introduction from the Italian consul in Calcutta. The Royal Academy in Rome turned him down, for it was already full for that year. Undeterred, Sashi secured an audience with the king, Umberto I, who was impressed with the young foreigner. On condition that he learnt Italian within three months, he was admitted to the Academy. Hesh spent three years in Rome, followed by a further six months in Munich. Two large nudes, a male and a female, executed in Rome and Munich, indicate his competence in the field (Figs 70, 71).<sup>139</sup> Hesh spent five years in Paris before arriving in London, where he painted Birdwood and Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian MP. In 1899, the National Indian Association threw a reception in his honour. Chairing the meeting, Tiirdwood welcomed Hesh as a shining example of Hindu resurgence, though cautioning against overconfidence in its endurance. Then Hesh Regaled the audience with an account of his life.<sup>140</sup>

An admirer of Classical art, Hesh told his audience that he found the Royal Academy disappointing. His criticism of British cultural dominance was rare for Indian academic artists, who had hitherto viewed European art through English eyes. The Bengali spent years on the Confident. He met his future wife Athalie Flamant in Paris, turning



70 S. Hesh: *Female Nude*, sketch produced in Rome?

71 S. Hesh: *Female Nude*, oil painted in Munich, now in Marble Palace, Calcutta



## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

Francophile and admiring Victor Hugo more than the English poets. Hesh's exposure to the French salon distanced him from British art, offering him ammunition for challenging the colonial legacy. Not that Hesh was uncritical in his admiration of Continental art. He deplored the modern vogue for realism in France which threatened idealism.<sup>141</sup> Hesh's anti-British stance was in tune with Hindu nationalism on the ascendant. Aurobindo Ghosh, soon to emerge as the theoretician of Hindu revolutionary politics, was a student in England a little earlier. Highly gifted, his unhappy years at a public school and university had alienated him from the West. After reading Classics with flying colours at Cambridge, he left for India as a champion of Hinduism against western values. The two were to meet in Baroda.<sup>142</sup>

Hesh returned to Calcutta in 1900 with his French betrothed. His orthodox family opposed the match but the couple was sheltered by the, scientist

72 F. Bose : A Woman  
Bronze, Baroda.

Jagdish Bose and his wife. Leaving Athalie with them, Hesh departed for

Baroda where the ground had been prepared by Birdwood and Naoroji. Sayaji Rao III, a keen patron of art, had gathered a number of Indian personalities around him. His Dewan Tanjore Madhava Rao's reforms had turned Baroda into a modern state with an impressive record of literacy, especially female literacy. The Gaekwad himself displayed an independence that irritated the British, but was attractive to the nationalists.<sup>143</sup>

Later, Sayaji Rao was forced by the British to curb his nationalist leanings but at the turn of the century Baroda was seething with cultural nationalism. When Aurobindo arrived in India, resentful of British dominance, he was engaged by the Gaekwad to teach at the Baroda College. His presence drew to Baroda followers of Balgangadhar Tilak. Dinendranath Roy, a Bengali journalist who recorded Aurobindo's short stay in Baroda (1892-1906), has left us a description of Hesh. The artist was put up in sumptuous quarters, normally reserved for Europeans. Roy admired the artist's dashing manner and his general bearing. On the other hand, even though Aurobindo was pleased with Hesh's nationalist sentiments, he disapproved of the artist's extravagant lifestyle. While in the princely state, Hesh did a portrait of Aurobindo, which is lost.<sup>144</sup>

Hesh's visit was not a success. Originally he was to paint the Gaekwad family, but Maharani Chimna Bai refused to sit for him. A smouldering rivalry between Hesh and an English painter did not help matters. The Englishman had come armed with an official recommendation and ,was assigned the restoration of oil aintings in the Palace. Hesh soon left Baroda in disappointment. I !«• resented the fact that for restoration work the English artist was receiving twice the amount that Hesh had been offered for portraits. Is it possible that Hesh's own personality was a factor in his failure at Baroda? Unlike him, Fanindranath Bose carried out his assignment successfully. There is evidence of Hesh's impetuosity. All the same, the Gaekwad's preference for Hesh could well have been overruled



by the English Resident, for he was already under pressure from the government for harbouring Aurobindo and other Indian nationalists.

On Hesh's return to Calcutta, he was married to Athalie on 14 April 1890, in accordance with Brahma rites. His family refused to participate. The wedding was attended by leading Bengalis and a few Europeans, for a while the couple were guests of the illustrator, Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri. Hesh soon established an impressive practice in portraiture with such sitters as Congress leaders, eminent thinkers and British officials.<sup>146</sup> But the early success was cruelly deceptive. Shortly after, he disappeared from the Calcutta art scene, never to return. According to a contemporary account, he went to try his luck at a princely state. Was this Hyderabad, since the Salar Jung Museum has his works? Later he appears to have emigrated to Canada. Mukul Dey, a graphic artist who reported meeting him in Canada around 1917, found him living in genteel poverty. Why did he leave Calcutta so suddenly? Is it possible that the high fees that he charged priced him out of the market? Or was he caught in rising orientalism when academic painters were fast losing their standing in the community? He was too ambitious to be on the margins of his profession.

The third artist who expected an Italian training was the short-lived sculptor Fanindranath Bose (1888-1926), whose professional success in Britain was rare for a non-European then. Son of a minor official in East Bengal, Bose joined the Calcutta art school, after a brief spell at the private Jubilee Art Academy. At sixteen he left for Italy. Unable to gain admission at either an Italian academy or the Royal College in London, he enrolled at the Board of Manufacturers School of Art at Edinburgh. On graduation, he worked with the sculptor Percy Portsmouth at the College of Art. The Stuart Prize and a travelling scholarship, offered jointly by Edinburgh University and the Bengal Government, enabled him to spend a year on the Continent. He continued his training in Paris, where he impressed Rodin with his work (Fig. 72). The use of broken surfaces in Bose's bronze statuettes shows both Rodin's and the Frenchman Mercie's inspiration.<sup>148</sup> He was part of the new sculpture movement in Britain (Fig. 73), whose members emulated Mercie's 'small-scale statuettes in which the taut, slightly twisted pose of the figures affords opportunity for the fullest display of modelled musculature and bodywork in rippling, reflective bronze'.

The Bengali sculptor settled in Edinburgh, marrying a Scottish woman and opening a sculpture studio there. His debut at the Royal Scottish Academy was in 1913. The next year he showed a bronze statuette, *Boy in Pain*, at the Royal Academy. His bronze *The Hunter*, exhibited in 1916, was bought by Sir William Goscombe John, a leading sculptor. John, who had worked under Rodin in Paris and produced small bronzes himself, was drawn to the sculpture. Bose entered *The Snake Charmer* for the 1919 and *The Athlete and the Hound* for the 1924 Royal Academy

73 M. J. A. Mercie: *David and Goliath*, bronze





## THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

exhibition. Another well-known work of the artist was *The End of the Day* inspired by Jean-Francois Millet (Fig. 74). Sayaji Rao, though subdued after the Aurobindo episode, continued to scout for Indian talent. Much impressed with *The Hunter* in Goscombe John's collection, he asked Bose to make a copy of it. This was followed by an invitation to produce eight sculptures for the Laxmi Vilas Palace gardens and two for the gallery at Baroda. Unable to find a good bronze casting foundry in Baroda, Bose soon returned to Edinburgh to complete the work. During his brief visit, he taught at the newly-established Fine Arts Faculty at the Baroda College. Bose treated Indian subjects, including a piece that drew inspiration from Mhatre's *To the Temple*.<sup>50</sup>

Fanindranath Bose was among the select Indians honoured at the fiftieth anniversary of the Gaekwad's accession. He had earned kudos in Britain, the dream of Indian academic artists. Today, his ambitious group of sculptures based on the New Testament and a standing sculpture of St John the Baptist adorn St John's Church at Perth in Scotland (Fig. 75). The group won him the Associateship of the Royal Scottish Academy. At the election, thirty-one votes were cast in his favour compared to eight for Benno Schotz, a local sculptor of German origin. *The Scotsman* stated:

His election is in recognition of the fact that art at its best transcends nationality . . . [but] while he has absorbed all the technique and naturalism of Western art, he is still faithful to the interior spirit of the Oriental. In his work there may be traced a subtle appreciation of Oriental character, yet expressed more or less in terms of the Western art.<sup>1"</sup>

In his reply to the toast of the Associates, Bose said that at a moment of strained relations between Britain and India, this honour would reassure Indians that the Scots did not wish to thwart their 'legitimate' aspirations. Naturally, Bose was nominated for the decorations of the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta and of New Delhi. Already machinations had begun among artists and art teachers in India for 'wresting a share of the decorations of the new capital. For unknown reason, these two highest honours for a colonial artist were turned down by the sculptor. Bose's successful career ended at thirty-seven after a brief illness. But his short life became significant in more than one sense. In 1920, appreciative piece by Nihal Singh in *The Graphic* of London sparked off a controversy between orientalist and westernisers in Bengal. Bose was described as 'the rising star [and] the first Bengali to gain international fame as a sculptor'.<sup>52</sup>

74 F. Bose: *The End of the Day*, bronze, exhibited at the Royal Academy



SALON ARTIST AND THE RISE OF THE INDIAN PUBLIC



75 F. Bosc: *St John* bronze  
St John's Kirk, Perth